



Media statement

WaterNSW releases Menindee flood operations review

17 November 2023

WaterNSW has released the findings of an internal review of its operations during the Menindee flooding events from May 2022 through to February 2023.

The independently reviewed report found improvements could be made in data collection upstream of the lakes, and in communications with the local community and other response agencies.

Feedback from the residents in the Menindee area contributed to the report's final recommendations, including:

- The development with community, of a coordinated communication and engagement plan for future events,
- A review of the river gauging network, to help inform decision making, and
- Improvements to the WaterNSW Computer Aided River Management decision support system technology.

WaterNSW will host an information session on the report for the Menindee community in coming weeks and thanks those who took time to contribute to the review process.

WaterNSW acknowledges the floods' devastating impact on the Menindee community, particularly those who rely heavily on the river and First Nations communities, given their deep connection to the river and country.

WaterNSW looks forward to working with the Menindee community and partner agencies to implement improvements for future events.

To read the full report including findings and recommendations visit:

<https://www.waternsw.com.au/water-services/extreme-weather-response/menindee-lakes-flood-review/>

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Background

Report findings in brief

Finding 1 – WaterNSW’ systems, policies and procedures are appropriate

WaterNSW has developed, and used during the Darling River flood events, appropriate systems, policies and procedures to work within its regulatory environment and fulfil its responsibilities regarding system operations, dam safety, asset management and incident management responsibilities.

Finding 2 – WaterNSW’ actions provided a flood mitigation benefit to the community

WaterNSW managed the Lakes throughout these events to the best of its ability within the operating rules and asset limitations of the system.

Acknowledging that some members of the community were impacted by the floods, the actions taken by WaterNSW provided a flood mitigation benefit to the community – reducing the magnitude of the peak instantaneous flood discharge by 29.2%.

Finding 3 – The river gauging network is not currently designed for Menindee Lakes flood operations

The report found the gauging network is not currently designed for Menindee Lakes flood operations – which contributed to high levels of uncertainty in the modelling of inflows to the lakes system.

Finding 4 – WaterNSW’ engagement and communication with other agencies was appropriate and consistent with the requirements of the Menindee Lakes operations procedures

WaterNSW and its partner agencies in water management, flood management and emergency management have well-established methods of engagement and communication that have operated for some time throughout multiple floods and other events across NSW.

Finding 5 – There are opportunities to improve communications and engagement with the local community

While multiple agencies made efforts to provide timely and important information, there remains confusion about roles and responsibilities in this complex environment, which contributes to poor understanding of where relevant information can be found during floods.

Many locals expressed the opportunity to be listened to by agencies in a more coordinated manner, with a desire to have their local knowledge, experience and connections to the river system incorporated into water system operations.

Recommendations summary

Recommendation 1 - Review the river gauging network

The report recommends a thorough review of the number and location of river gauges by WaterNSW and partner agencies, with a view to recommending the need for any new and/or modified river gauges that will account for system losses and gains between Wilcannia and Wentworth.

Recommendation 2 - Develop a formalised communication and engagement protocol with other agencies

While each agency has its own means of communicating and engaging, it is recommended that a coordinated multi-agency communication plan be developed in consultation with the local community.

Recommendation 3 – Continue to deliver improvements to the Computer Aided River Management (CARM) decision support system

For Menindee Lakes flood operations, it is recommended to focus on:

- Improved forecasting of river flows upstream of Wilcannia,
- Improved understanding of flow behaviour between Wilcannia and the Menindee Lakes, and downstream of the lakes, and
- More detailed tools, models and analysis for flood operations.

ENDS